UNITED
NATIONS

CRC

Convention on the
Rights of the Child

Distr.
GENERAL

CRC/C/SR.344
4 March 1997

ENGLISH
Original: FRENCH

COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Fourteenth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 344th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Monday, 6 January 1997, at 10.30 a.m.

Chairperson: Mrs. BELEMBAOGO

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GE.97-15006 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 11.10 a.m.

OPENING OF THE SESSION

1. The CHAIRPERSON declared open the fourteenth session of the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA (item 1 of the provisional agenda)

2. The provisional agenda (CRC/C/59) was adopted.

ORGANIZATIONAL AND OTHER MATTERS (agenda item 2)

3. Mrs. RAADI-AZARAKHCHI (Secretary of the Committee) said that the Committee had received a total of 96 initial reports (two of them for reconsideration) 62 of which had already been considered. Currently, there were 188 States parties to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

STATEMENT BY THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

4. Mr. FALL (Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights), recalling that the rights of the child occupied a prominent place in the Vienna Programme of Action, said he hoped that the Committee would make a positive contribution to the 1998 review, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, of the goals set in the Programme of Action.

5. At its fifty-first session, the General Assembly had adopted several resolutions relevant to the Committee's work. In its resolution entitled "The rights of the child" (A/C.3/51/L.37), it welcomed the report submitted by the Committee (A/51/41) and took note with appreciation of the constructive role played by the Committee in creating awareness of the principles and provisions of the Convention and in providing recommendations to States parties on its implementation. In part II of the same resolution, entitled "Protection of children affected by armed conflict", the General Assembly, after welcoming the report of the expert of the Secretary-General on the impact of armed conflict on children (A/51/306 and Add.1), recommended that the Secretary-General appoint for a period of three years a Special Representative on the impact of armed conflict on children, and requested the Special Representative to submit to the General Assembly and the Commission on Human Rights an annual report on the situation of children affected by armed conflicts.

6. In part IV of the resolution, the General Assembly expressed its support for the work of the Special Rapporteur appointed by the Commission on Human Rights to examine the question of the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, whose report (A/51/456) had been submitted to the Assembly, and welcomed the convening at Stockholm of the World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children and the adoption and dissemination of the Declaration and Agenda for Action of the Congress.

7. In part III of the resolution, on refugee and internally displaced children, the General Assembly called for the continual monitoring of the care arrangements of unaccompanied refugee and internally displaced children. Lastly, in part VI of the resolution, on the plight of street children, the General Assembly recommended that the Committee should give attention to that growing problem when examining reports from States parties.

8. In its resolution entitled "The girl child" (A/C.3/51/L.31), the General Assembly urged all States to take all necessary measures and to institute legal reforms to ensure the full and equal enjoyment by the girl child of all human rights and fundamental freedoms and to take effective action against violations of those rights and freedoms.

9. It was a matter for satisfaction that, following the informal meeting held at Cairo between the members of the Committee on the Rights of Child and the members of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the two Committees were planning to strengthen their cooperation, a move that was very much in the spirit of an integrated approach to human rights.

10. In its resolution entitled "Effective implementation of international instruments on human rights, including reporting obligations under international instruments on human rights" (A/C.3/51/L.34/Rev.1), the General Assembly welcomed the report of the persons chairing the human rights treaty bodies on their 7th meeting (A/51/482) and requested the Secretary-General to prepare a detailed analytical study comparing the provisions of the six main international human rights instruments with a view to identifying duplication of reporting required under those instruments.

11. The Committee on Human Rights, the Committee against Torture and the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, each of which had held a session in autumn 1996, had requested the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to prepare a special report on Hong Kong in the context of the forthcoming transfer of sovereignty to China. It should also be pointed out that the Committee against Torture had invited the Government of Israel to submit to it, as a matter of urgency, a report on the statement by the Supreme Court authorizing the use of physical coercion by the security services during the interrogation of persons suspected of acts of terrorism.

12. Lastly, he assured the Committee of his full support for its work.

13. The CHAIRPERSON welcomed the fact that the General Assembly had, for the first time, adopted such a large number of resolutions concerning the rights of the child, a reflection of the international community's increasingly explicit commitment to children. It was important, however, that the resolutions should not remain dead letters. In that connection, encouragement could be drawn from the report of Mrs. Graça Machel, the expert appointed by the Secretary-General to study the impact of armed conflict on children, the information given by the various treaty bodies on the integration and complementarity of their work, the Cairo visit organized by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and the discussions with the International Labour Organization (ILO).

14. Mr. KOLOSOV noted with satisfaction that the Committee on the Rights of the Child had, at its thirteenth session, adopted the general guidelines regarding the form and content of initial reports to be submitted by States parties under article 44, paragraph 1, subparagraph (a), of the Convention (CRC/C/5), but he wondered how the Committee would be able to cope with its steadily increasing workload. It would also be desirable to find some way of speeding up the process of adopting the amendment to the Convention concerning the increase in the Committee's membership.

15. Mrs. SANTOS PAIS said that, while she welcomed the fact that the General Assembly had taken note with appreciation of the Committee's report, she found it regrettable that the Member States represented in the Assembly had not even mentioned the report in their statements. It might, perhaps, be useful if a member of the Committee were to make a presentation to the Assembly on the main features of the Committee's work so as to make it more aware of those activities.

16. She shared Mr. Kolosov's concern about the Committee's increasing workload and hoped that it would receive more sustained support from the Secretariat in the future. For example, it would be useful if the written replies by Governments on the issues to be taken up during the consideration of their reports were sent to the members of the Committee well in advance of its sessions, so that they would have time to study the replies and prepare for the discussions with the delegations of the States parties.

17. The CHAIRPERSON said that she supported the suggestions made by the members of the Committee. She wondered whether the Centre for Human Rights could, on the occasion of the meeting of the representatives of States parties to elect new members of the Committee, bring up the possibility of speeding up the implementation of the recommendation for an increase in its membership.

18. Mr. FALL (Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights) said that there were four points he would like to bring to the attention of the members of the Committee. First of all, the question of the implementation of the amendment to the Convention to increase the Committee's membership should be looked at in the more general context of the implementation of the human rights instruments. For example, the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families had aroused a very lively interest among Member States, but not many of them had ratified it. That was unfortunately true of other instruments and the proposed amendments to them. The Centre for Human Rights could indeed remind the States parties that they had adopted the amendment to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, but it could not go any further than that. In view, however, of the decision taken at Vienna concerning the universal ratification of the human rights instruments, it would be possible for the new Secretary-General of the United Nations to reiterate the appeal made in that regard by Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali in 1996.

19. Secondly, with respect to the interest shown by the General Assembly in questions connected with the rights of the child, he doubted whether a presentation to the General Assembly by a member of the Committee on its main areas of work would make the Member States any more aware of the problems of children. It would be better to consider whether the policy followed by the

Centre for Human Rights was appropriate to ensure that the costly documents were read and understood and to secure a timely reaction from the Member States. It might be useful to give some thought to that point and make a recommendation to the Secretary-General.

20. Thirdly, with regard to the new situation confronting the Committee, he recalled that the United Nations was going through a serious financial and budgetary crisis which was having an impact on the work of the Secretariat despite its constant efforts to ensure that the Committee's recommendations were followed up. Nevertheless, he noted with satisfaction that, in the context of the plan of action to strengthen the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the High Commissioner had received voluntary contributions which, it was hoped, would enable him to recruit two or three additional staff members who could help with the Committee's work.

21. Fourthly, he welcomed the cooperation between the Committee and other relevant organs and organizations of the United Nations system, such as ILO, which was doing everything possible to ensure the implementation of the articles of the Convention concerning the prohibition of child labour. He recalled also the importance for children of the right to food, emphasized at the recent World Food Summit held at Rome under the auspices of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and of the right to adequate housing highlighted at Istanbul during the Habitat II Conference. The Committee's cooperation with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (right to education) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (displaced and refugee children) also deserved mention.

22. The CHAIRPERSON, having thanked the Assistant Secretary-General for his statement, invited the members of the Committee to hold private consultations immediately after the meeting rose.

The meeting rose at 12.30 p.m.